

Soldiers *Online*

Story and Photos by MSG Vern Borth

Army Green,



Students of the Army Reserve's 84th Division use hand signals to communicate movement instructions to the engineer of a locomotive in the rail yard of Fort Eustis, Va.

Silver Rails



IT was dark at the Fort Eustis, Va., rail yard, and the student crew had broken out the signal lanterns. For SSG Montague Martin it was time to assign a project. He had a list of four railcars that were scattered in the yard.

"I want the four cars in this order," he said as he handed a slip of paper to one of his railroad operations crewmembers in training. "How are they right now? I have no idea, but they are not in that order."

As his soldiers set off on foot to find the numbered cars on the list, Martin shouted gleefully, "We're gonna start switchin' some cars now!" he said.

In a quieter tone, "as a little boy, I never thought I'd be around trains." But, after 18 years in the military, "this is the job that I fell into, and I like it."

Martin, of Waukegan, Ill., is assigned to the 8th Battalion, 84th Regiment, 4th Brigade, of the Army Reserve's 84th Institutional Training Division.

Instructors from the 8th Bn., located at Fort Sheridan, Ill., teach soldiers how to run railroads. Students training for this military occupational specialty become railway operations crewmembers (MOS 88U), railway equipment repairers (MOS 88P) and railway section repairers (MOS 88T).

Even though rail transport has been vital for major deployments such as Operation Desert Storm and peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, "rail in the U.S. Army is kind of a forgotten thing," said MSG Tim Traub, MOS qualification course manager.

Only two Army Reserve battalions provide the soldiers to operate and repair Army trains and repair the tracks they run on, "and we're the only ones that train them," said Traub.

SSG Vernon Archiquette, primary trainer for railway operations crewmembers, as a civilian operates a Union Pacific freight train between Milwaukee, Wis., and the central part of the state. He and Traub were members of the 757th Transportation Bn. before



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Students in the railway section repairer qualification course work together to move a rail section.

transferring to the 84th Div. when it began offering railway MOS training, and recruited several 757th Bn. soldiers to be instructors.

The railway training offered by the 84th was created to facilitate reclassification for the in-demand MOS category and give internal unit training a strong start. It includes either four or six inactive duty training weekends for Phase 1 and two weeks of intensive resident training for Phase 2.

Phase 1 occurs at rail battalion

A railway operations crewmember signals to the engineer of a locomotive moving rail cars in the Fort Eustis yard.



training sites in Sunny Point, N.C., Middletown, Conn., and Milwaukee. Phase 2 is at the Army's transportation school at Fort Eustis, Va.

While the Phase 1 sites allow locomotives to travel no more than 10 mph where facilities are available, the Fort Eustis site has track allowing speeds up to 35 mph. It also has lab facilities for diesel and electrical study, and enough roadway for track repairers to learn their jobs.

"Many students say it's the best training they ever had in the military," said Traub. "We get repeat customers, students coming back for a second and third railway MOS."

The multiple qualification "is good for them and it's good for us," he said, because it creates more well-rounded soldiers who have more position and promotion opportunities.

As with Archiquette, the opportunities extend to the civilian world. "They can get railroad jobs at the drop of a hat," said Traub. The training can be a stepping stone to obtaining Federal Railroad Administration certification as a railroad engineer.

SSG Scott Howlett of the 757th Trans. Bn.'s 1150th Trans. Company in Lincolnwood, Ill., was Archiquette's student in 2000 and returned in 2001 as an assistant instructor. A diesel mechanic for a Chicago suburban bus company, he had train sets as a boy and now, "I'd like to do it full time like Archie," he said.

"I always wanted to operate a train when I was a kid," said SPC Dave Wiersma of the 1152nd Trans. Co. in Milwaukee. "My grandfather was an engineer."

MSG William Sedgewick, who drills with a 1205th Trans. Bn. detachment at Blue Grass Army Depot, Ky., has been an Army intelligence analyst and is a civilian technical writer. "I ride a computer all the time. I'd rather do this," he said during a break from laying railroad tracks on a hot Fort Eustis afternoon. "It's more fun."

Also moving track was SGT Jodi Kanitz of the 1152nd Trans. Co. Already a qualified railway operations crewmember, she was training to be a railway section repairer. "Next, I want

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to qualify as an 88P," she said

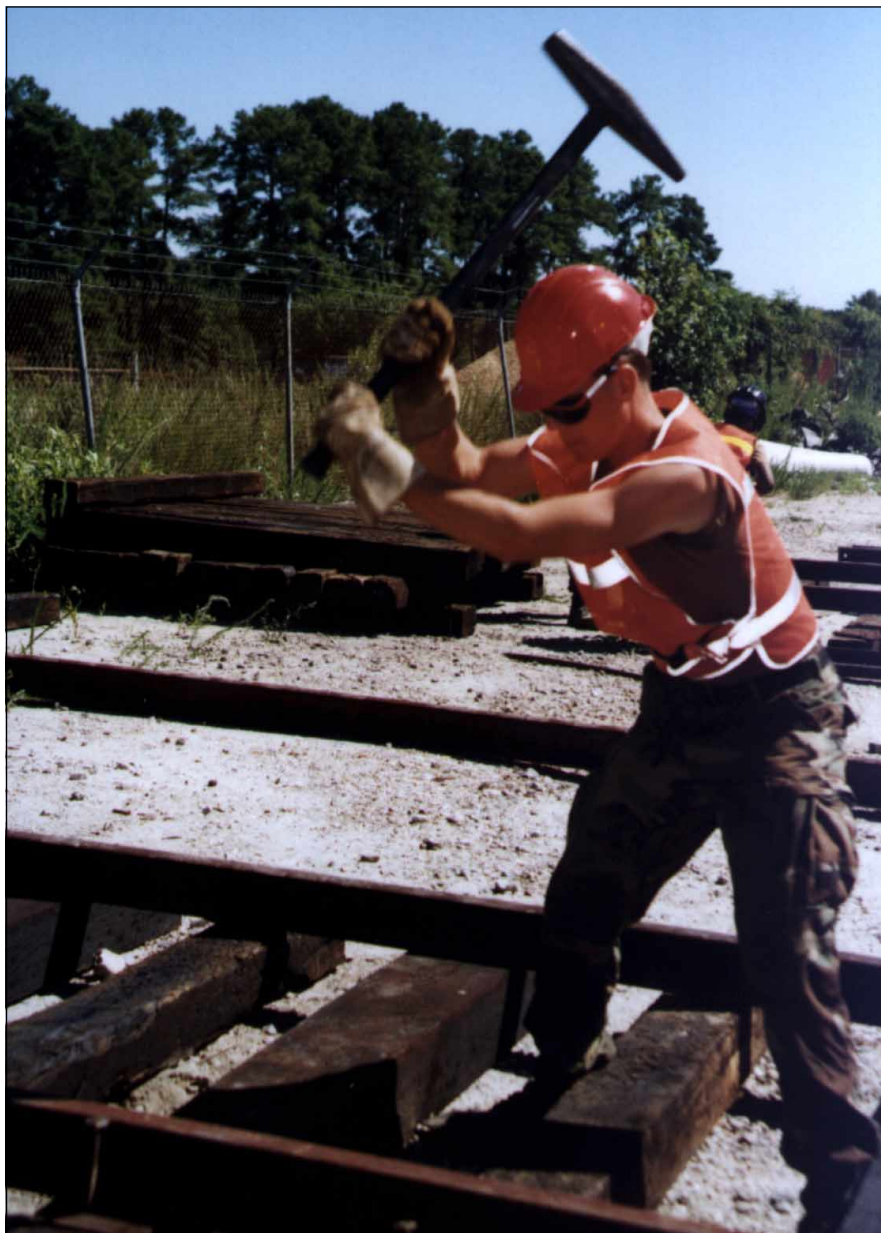
The "Papas" repair rail cars and locomotives, which weigh more than main battle tanks. The 88Ps repair wheel sets, brake systems, electrical systems and diesel engines, "everything that touches the rail, to the top of the smoke stack," said SFC Gary Kusy,

primary instructor for the equipment repairer course. They must know parts of both the 88U and 88T MOS skills to perform well as "papas," he said.

They also must know how to use ramps, cranes, 35-ton jacks and forklifts to get rolling stock back on the tracks after a derailment.

When asked why they became part of the 8th Bn., most instructors said it was either because they loved railroad-ing or because they loved teaching.

"You have to care and have to want to make a difference," Traub said. "You have to have a passion for what you do." □



SPC David Cibrario of the Army Reserve's Milwaukee-based 1152nd Transportation Company drives a spike during railway section repairer training.